# Toyota Studies Hybrid Switch

### By Norihiko Shirouzu

DETROIT—Toyota Motor Corp. may have found a way to quiet criticism that the fuel-efficiency of its performance-oriented gasoline-electric hybrids, including the Lexus RX400h, is lacking.

Jim Press, president of Toyota's U.S. sales unit, said the Japanese auto maker is studying a simple switch, or lever, that the driver can turn or pull to choose between two different settings for a hybrid powertrain: "green" or "power."

The concept is under study, Mr. Press said in an interview during a media preview at the North American International Auto Show in Detroit.

The envisioned lever is similar to an air-conditioning switch in the car that lets the driver set its temperature, he said.

The Prius, a Toyota hybrid that goes about 45 miles on a gallon of gas on average, has been a darling of environmentalists who are pushing auto makers to improve vehicle fuel economy by using technology like gasoline-electric hybrid propulsion.

Some of those same environmental activists, however, have griped that Toyota's other hybrid vehicles, especially the Lexus RX400h, are too performance-oriented and Toyota hasn't made hybrid sport-utility vehicles fuel-efficient enough.

A four-wheel-drive version of the RX400h goes 31 miles per gallon in the city and 27 miles on the highway, according to Toyota.

Bob Carter, head of Toyota's Lexus division in the U.S., said what luxury buyers want is a "no-compromise" hybrid vehicle that can save gas and go fast at the same time when necessary.

Toyota can engineer a luxury vehicle like the RX400h to focus solely on fuel economy. "But it wouldn't be a luxury vehicle if it didn't have the kind of power and the performance luxury buyers are looking for," he said.

Mr. Carter also confirmed the green-performance switch is being developed by Toyota engineers. He didn't offer further details. On weekdays, "you may want fuel economy, but Sunday you might want to go and drive the wheels off. That's really what we are after," Mr. Carter said.